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AMENDMENT TO THE CLAIMS

The text of all pending claims, (including withdrawn claims) is set forth below. Cancelled and not entered claims are indicated with claim number and status only. The claims as listed below show added text with underlining and deleted text with ~~strikes through~~. The status of each claim is indicated with one of (original), (currently amended), (cancelled), (withdrawn), (new), (previously presented), or (not entered).

1. - 12. (cancelled).

¹³14. (new) A method of franking and processing parcels, comprising the steps of:

- receiving a parcel franking request, said request comprising parcel delivery data;
- generating a franking number for said parcel, said franking number being humanly readable and associated with said delivery data;
- storing said franking number and delivery data in a database; and
- assigning a validity time period to said franking number.

¹⁴15. (new) The method according to claim ¹³14, further comprising the steps of

- after said parcel has been introduced into a mailstream, reading said franking number and delivery data and locating said franking number and delivery data within said database;
- initiating handling of said parcel and expiration of said time period if said franking number and delivery data are located; and
- rejecting said parcel if said franking number and delivery data are not located or said time period is expired.

¹⁵16. (new) The method according to claim ¹⁴15, wherein said step of receiving further comprises the step of receiving payment means data and further comprising the step of verifying said payment means.

¹⁶17. (new) The method according to claim ¹³14, wherein said destination data comprises a parcel delivery address.

¹⁷18. (new) The method according to claim ¹³14, wherein said franking number comprises a select number of alphanumeric characters.

¹⁸19. (new) The method according to claim ¹⁷18, wherein an initial alphanumeric character is a franking symbol.

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- 19¹³ 20. (new) The method according to claim 14, wherein said franking request is received from a parcel sender and said method further comprises the step of transmitting said franking number to said sender.
- 20¹³ 21. (new) The method according to claim 14, further comprising the step of applying a machine readable code to said parcel if said franking number and delivery data are located within said database.
- 21¹⁶ 22. (new) The method according to claim 17, further comprising the step of validating said delivery address.
- 22²¹ 23. (new) The method according to claim 22, wherein said step of validating further comprises the steps of:
- consulting an address for forwarding database;
 - finding a match between said delivery address and said address for forwarding; and
 - if a match is found, substituting a forwarding address for said delivery address.
- 23²⁴ 24. (new) The method according to claim 25, further comprising the step of informing a sender of said parcel of said forwarding address if a match is found.
- 24²¹ 25. (new) the method according to claim 22, wherein said step of validating further comprises the steps of:
- determining if said destination address is formatted for optical character recognition; and
 - informing a parcel sender if said destination address is not formatted for optical character recognition and how said address could be formatted for optical character recognition.
- 25¹³ 26. (new) The method according to claim 14, further comprising the step of recording franking costs.
- 26¹³ 27. (new) The method according to claim 14, further comprising the step of tracking said parcel through said mail stream via said franking number.
- 27¹⁴ 28. (new) The method according to claim 19, further comprising the step of tracking said parcel through said mail stream via said franking number.
- 28²⁶ 29. (new) The method according to claim 27, further comprising the steps of:
- determining a cost for said parcel based at least upon said parcels travel through said mailstream; and
 - charging said cost to a sender of said parcel.

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29 30. (new) The method according to claim 29, wherein said step of determining a cost further comprises the step of determining a cost based upon at least one of weight, size and class of service of said parcel.
- 30 31. (new) A method of franking and posting a parcel comprising the steps of:
- generating a franking request, said franking request comprising parcel delivery data;
 - receiving a franking number, said franking number being humanly readable, associated with said delivery data, and stored in a database for a limited validity time;
 - printing said franking number on an address face of said parcel; and
 - delivering said parcel to a mailstream entry point.
- 31 32. (new) The method according to step 32, wherein said step of delivering is made such that after delivery, delivery data is scanned and said limited validity time is expired.
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32 33. (new) The method according to claim 31, further comprising the step of printing identifying characters on said address face, said characters identifying said parcel as electronic post.
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33 34. (new) The method according to claim 31, wherein said franking number comprises a plurality of alpha numeric characters.
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34 35. (new) The method according to claim 34, wherein a first of said alphanumeric characters is a franking symbol.
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35 36. (new) The method according to claim 31, further comprising the step of transmitting said franking request to a franking provider.
- 36 37. (new) The method according to claim 36, wherein said transmitting is performed over the Internet.
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37 38. (new) The method according to claim 36, wherein said franking number is received via the Internet.
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38 39. (new) The method according to claim 36, wherein said parcel delivery data comprises a destination address.
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39 40. (new) The method according to claim 31, further comprising the step of receiving addressor information confirmation from said franking provider.
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40 41. (new) The method according to claim 31, further comprising the step of receiving addressor information formatting confirmation.